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New York

President:	Mr. Ibrahim	(Malaysia)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Gimolieca
	China	Mr. Shen Bo
	Egypt	Mr. Elshandawily
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Japan	Mr. Okamura
	New Zealand	Mr. Van Bohemen
	Russian Federation	Mr. Iliichev
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Spain	Mr. González de Linares Palou
	Ukraine	Mr. Vitrenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Wilson
	United States of America	Mr. Pressman
	Uruguay	Mr. Bermúdez
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Méndez Graterol

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, to participate in this meeting.

On behalf of the Council, I welcome Mr. Mladenov, who is joining today's meeting via video-teleconference from Jerusalem.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to Mladenov.

Mr. Mladenov: With no prospect in sight for resuming negotiations, developments on the ground in Israel and Palestine continue to undermine an already precarious situation. Illegal settlement construction advances, Gaza remains beyond the control of the legitimate Palestinian Authority and the political leadership on both sides continues to shy away from the steps that are necessary for peace. That is the reality that continues to erode trust in the prospect for a two-State solution, the constituency for which is dwindling both in Israel and Palestine.

Although the past month has been relatively calm in terms of the frequency and intensity of violence in Israel and in the occupied Palestinian territory, a number of security-related incidents continued to cause concern. First, there was the apparent extrajudicial execution by members of the Palestinian security forces in Nablus on 23 August of a man, while in custody. He was suspected of orchestrating the killing of two security personnel earlier in the week. I welcome the announcement by Prime Minister Hamdallah of an investigation and call for a thorough, independent and transparent process, in line with international standards, in order to bring to justice the perpetrators of that crime.

On 21 August, militants in Gaza fired two rockets, one of which landed in a residential area of Sderot, causing no injuries. Israel responded by directing some 60 missiles and shells at 30 suspected military installations in Gaza. Once again, I reiterate that such rocket attacks and the response they elicit risk lives of both Palestinians and Israelis and do not serve the cause of peace.

On 26 August, a Palestinian man, who was reportedly under psychiatric care, was killed by members of the Israeli security forces. A preliminary investigation established that he was unarmed and did not pose a threat. I call upon Israel to ensure accountability and take all the necessary measures protect against the unjustified use of force.

It is against such a backdrop that preparations are advancing for the 8 October Palestinian local council elections. In a positive development, on 25 July, political parties signed an electoral code of conduct, to which all parties and candidates must adhere. The elections are expected to be the first simultaneous polls in the West Bank and Gaza since 2006.

Conducting the local elections in line with established international standards can contribute to advancing Palestinian reconciliation. The lack of unity, however, or any attempt to influence the outcome of the elections, including through intimidation, threats, violence or coercion, risks widening divisions and undermining the Palestinian national cause. In that respect, the recent decision by Fatah to bring the party together — a decision welcomed by Jordan, Egypt and the region — is an important step towards laying the groundwork for national reconciliation and unity.

Turning briefly to Gaza, three days ago we marked the two-year anniversary of the ceasefire to the last Gaza conflict. While progress has been made on rebuilding from the physical damage, sadly we are miles away from repairing the physical and psychological damage of the conflict. While Gaza remains locked away from the rest of the world, in the grip of militants and dependent upon aid and humanitarian assistance, the status quo will prevail. We need a radical overhaul of how we deal with the problems of Gaza.

Until the closures are lifted, the militant build-up has ceased and Gaza is back under the control of the legitimate Palestinian authorities, international funding and an uninterrupted flow of aid are a lifeline to over 1 million Palestinians in the Strip, who are struggling to survive within a dire humanitarian situation. In that context, I commend the Government of Palestine for enabling a much-needed humanitarian payment to over 20,000 unpaid civilian employees in Gaza,

made possible by the generous donation from the State of Qatar.

Separately, however, I am very concerned about the recent Israeli indictments of two aid workers accused of diverting funds and/or material to Hamas. Those are very serious and deeply troubling accusations, which must be investigated throughly and quickly and proved in a court of law. I welcome the commitment of the United Nations Development Programme and World Vision International to uphold the highest standards of accountability. It is important that the international community continue to enforce its policy of zero-tolerance for any wrongdoing and assures partners that robust measures are in place to ensure that aid goes to those for whom it is intended.

It has been nearly two months since the Middle East Quartet outlined clearly the threats to the two-State solution and offered practical recommendations to enable an eventual return to meaningful negotiations to end the occupation that began in 1967. Its recommendations, however, continue to be ignored, including by way of a surge in Israeli settlement-related announcements and continuing demolitions. Let me focus briefly on the expanding Israeli footprint in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, which Russia, the European Union, the United States and the Secretary-General — all part of the Quartet — have clearly condemned.

We heard that settlement construction was not an impediment to a two-State solution — that "a few houses" were not a problem for peace. Let me ask in return: How will advancing the construction of over 1,700 housing units bring the parties closer to negotiated peace, uphold the two-State solution, create hope for the Palestinian people or bring security to Israelis? Since 1 July, Israel has advanced plans for over 1,000 housing units in occupied East Jerusalem — in Pisgat Ze'ev, Ramot, Har Homa and Gilo — as well as 735 units in Ma'ale Adumim and other locations in the West Bank. It has published tenders, some new, for 323 units in East Jerusalem settlements and reissued tenders for 42 units in Kiryat Arba, near Hebron, for which it also allocated over $13 million of new funding.

It is undertaking a new land survey to identify potential "State land" in the sensitive E-2 area. That step could enable the establishment of a new settlement on the outskirts of Bethlehem, further restricting that city's development and contributing to the dismemberment of the West Bank. It is also reportedly examining plans for new housing units for 100 Israelis on a portion of a military compound in Hebron that it has allocated for that purpose.

Israel advanced the so-called retroactive "legalization" of the Horesh Yaron and Rechelim outposts and put forward a potentially precedent-setting proposal to relocate the illegal outpost of Amona — which is slated by Israel's High Court of Justice for dismantling by the end of the year — onto nearby "absentee land".

All of those plans would essentially create new illegal settlements, and I call on Israel to cease and reverse those decisions. Let me be clear: no legal acrobatics can change the fact that all outposts — whether "legalized" under Israeli law or not, whether located on State land, absentee land or private land — just like all settlements in Area C and East Jerusalem, remain illegal under international law. It is difficult to read in those actions a genuine intention to work towards a viable two-State solution. This appears to reinforce a policy, carried out over decades, that has enabled over half a million Israelis to settle in territory that was occupied militarily in 1967.

The Quartet highlighted that Palestinians living in Area C and East Jerusalem were also disproportionately denied Israeli building permits. The past two months have seen an increase in the enforcement of non-punitive demolition orders against Palestinian structures in East Jerusalem, with 43 structures demolished, affecting more than 340 people. According to our colleagues in the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, in Area C in August alone, over 91 structures across 26 communities were demolished for the lack of Israeli building permits, displacing 125 people and affecting the livelihoods of over 2,100.

The Bedouins in Area C are particularly vulnerable. Some communities, such as the herders in Susiya and those in the controversial E-1 area around East Jerusalem, are particularly at risk, especially as settlement expansion plans move forward. Repeated rounds of demolitions of homes or livelihoods and restrictions on basic services are part of an environment that pressures those communities to move. Susiya, for example, is built on private Palestinian land in the southern West Bank. It is sandwiched between a settlement and an outpost. For years, planning schemes submitted by the residents to the Israeli authorities have been repeatedly

rejected, while the neighbouring settlement has been granted a generous planning scheme, and the nearby illegal outpost is connected to water and electricity networks. The demolition of that community would set a dangerous precedent for displacement and fuel the perception that Israel aims at a de facto annexation of Area C.

I note a new plan for the occupied West Bank, announced recently, promoting differential treatment to areas of the occupied West Bank from which perpetrators or suspected perpetrators of attacks against Israelis originate. While measures that generate economic opportunities for some Palestinians are helpful, they cannot come at the cost of what may amount to collective punishment for others, or undermine the legitimate Palestinian institutions and aspirations for ending the occupation.

Turning briefly to the Golan, the situation remains volatile and continues to undermine the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement. Fighting between the Syrian armed forces and armed groups in the areas of separation and limitation continue, with several incidents across the ceasefire line reported.

I take this opportunity to also draw attention to a nearly $100 million shortfall in the core budget of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). That funding gap affects UNRWA's key services for vulnerable Palestine refugees throughout the region and compounds regional instability. It must be addressed with the utmost urgency.

In conclusion, let me say that, more than 37 years ago, the Security Council determined that Israeli settlements in occupied territory had no legal validity and were an obstruction to achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East. That determination was true in 1979, and it is equally true, and even more urgent a concern, today. For years, we have been managing this conflict while the occupation has continued, Palestinians have been dispossessed and a one-State reality has been establishing itself on the ground. It is time for all of us — the leaders on both sides, with support from the region and the international community — to end the conflict on the basis of the relevant Security Council resolutions and in a manner that meets the legitimate national aspirations of both peoples. Both sides should work to reverse the negative trajectory, to build trust and to restore hope that a negotiated two-State solution is not just a political slogan, but a reality that can be achieved through negotiations within our lifetime.

The President: I thank Mr. Mladenov for his briefing.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.20 a.m.